



PROPHET MUSA عليه السلام

THE JOURNEY FROM THE MOUNTAIN

By Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid



Fourth in a seven part series:

ULU-L-AZIM

THE GREAT ONES



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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Lecture by Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid
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Shaykh Nooruddeen Durkee
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Surah al Fatiha

AL-HAMDU-LI-LLÄHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULÛBI
WA-L-ABSÄR.
ALLÄHUMMA THABIT QULÛBANA
°ALA SIRÄTIKA-L-QAWÛM,
WA-J°ALNÄ LI-WAJHIKA MUTTAJIHÛN,
WA SALLI °ALA-Sh-ShAFI°I-L-HABÛB,
RAHMATIL-°ÄLAMÛN, WA MANÄRI-L-NAJIYÛN,
WA MARSÄ-L-°ÄRIFÛN.

Praise be to Allah, the Turner of the hearts and sight.
O Allah, fix our hearts on the best of Your ways,
and make us face You in our way,
and bestow blessings on the beloved intercessor,
the mercy of all the worlds, the lighthouse of the survivors,
the harbor of the knowers.

RABBI-Sh-RAH LI SAD°RI
WA YASSIRLII °AMRI
WA-H-LUL °UQ°DATAM-MI-L-LISANI
YA FQAHU QOWLI.
[20:25-28]

My Lord, open my heart,
And make easy my task,
And loosen the knot from my tongue
that they may understand my speech.

INTRODUCTION

One of the last things my Shaykh Azad Rasool (*alayhi rahmo*) said to me before he passed from this world was, "Speak about sincerity, and speak with sincerity." Shaykh Nooruddeen started there also, with a teaching from his Shaykh, Shaykh Ibrahim Batawi. Shaykh Ibrahim entered my heart today. Shaykh Nooruddeen said to me, "How many *ruk'as* did you pray today?" "I said four." He asked me why. I said, "I felt like it. The truth is while I was standing down there, Shaykh Ibrahim came into my heart so strongly. I remembered that he always liked to pray the complete *ruk'as*, even if he was traveling. So I took permission and prayed four *ruk'as*. Ostensibly, I took permission from the people in the room, but I think I took permission from Shaykh Ibrahim (*alayhi rahmo*), and may he be so strong here.

It's fitting on my return from Egypt that I should be talking about the Prophet Musa عليه السلام, about the challenges of overcoming hardship, and the process of changing society. While I was in Egypt I spoke with many people, some who have little hope for their future and many who feel there is hope. There are those who are trying to see through the obstacles that are across the path of hope and change. There are some who, even with the tyrants at their backs, say, "My Lord is with me and He will guide me through." I spent most of my time with young professionals – young, hopeful people. At this crossroads in history, as least in Egypt, it's a good time to re-tell the story of Musa عليه السلام, remembering that things that happened in that same land thousands of years ago that shaped human history, are still shaping the course of human history to this day.

As with every talk in this series of the Messengers, we are reminded that these stories of the Prophets are not just stories or metaphors. These prophetic stories have lasted thousands of years. They are analogical, and they are relevant to today, because the problems faced by these prophets are not unique. They come to every generation. These stories are an *'ayat*, an *isharat*, pointing-hinting us toward the Divinely inspired ways to face and overcome the challenges of our own lives. In Surah Yusuf Allah ﷻ says:

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَى
وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً
لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

LAQAD⁴ KĀNA FĪ QASASIHIM 'IB⁴RATUL-LI'ULĪ
AL-'ALBĀBI MĀ KĀNA HADĪTHA⁵NY-YUFTARĀ WA
LĀKIN⁶ TASDĪQA-LLADHĪ BAYNA YADAYHI WA
TAFSĪLA KULLI SHAY'IN⁷W-WAHUDAN⁸W-WA
RAHMATAL-LIQAWMIN⁹Y-YU'MINUN.

In their history there is truly a lesson for those of understanding. It (the Quran) is no invented story, but a confirmation of the existing [books] from before, and a detailed explanation of everything. And it is guidance and Mercy for the people who believe. [12:111]

Let's hold onto this idea of people who believe; it's important to understand. Allah tells us in Qur'an that this is not just a story to be told; it's a sign. It's a sign of many things. It's a sign of the Reality of the Divine. It's a sign of the secrets of the world. It's a sign that evil doesn't win, but is finally overcome. The modern day story of Egypt is, in some ways, a reminder of the story of ancient Egypt and the struggles of Musa عليه السلام to overcome evil. When people stand in the streets in defiance of the tyrants, or on their knees praying—not extremists but moderate Muslims—they are calling out to Allah to assist them, to open a way where there was no way before. This revolution brought new life into an old land. But instead of leaving it with hope, it has given in to entropy, corruption, and further economic and social hardship for many, many people. While the modern "Pharaoh" now continues to live where the ancient Pharaohs are buried, the contrasts are stunning: poverty in Imbaba contrasted with incredible wealth in "Sixth of October City," and a disappearing middle class. Certainly, it is a preamble to what is happening in other parts of the world including the United States. And yet a few good people continue to struggle to carry on the message of justice and freedom.

Youthful hope? Certainly, but hope can also be found among many of the middle-aged and elderly people. There is a taste for positive change and a dearth of ideas on how it can take place. There is an internal repentance that can be felt in some quarters – a collective humility and repentance for decades of inaction and submission to the “Pharaoh,” while apparently submitting to Allah. Many parallels can be drawn between our modern day struggles against tyrants (inner and outer) and the struggles of Sidna Musa عليه السلام. But all this is another talk and I want to return to Sidna Musa عليه السلام and his story, and the stories of struggle against injustice and prejudice, fear and hopelessness that have been the stories of people and communities throughout human history, repeated and remembered generation after generation.

The life of Sidna Musa عليه السلام is replete with examples of sacrifice and *suluk* (journeying). Each in its own way is a migration from some element of character or faith: from anger to repentance (killing the Egyptian), from doubt to knowledge (travels with Khidr), from assumption to reality (30 days of fasting, and then receiving the instruction to fast another 10 days), and from expectation to surprise (when the golden calf was created). All these things fall within the plan of Allah ﷻ and we should never forget it. Allah makes known His plan only to the extent to which it is beneficial to mankind or necessary to make a test meaningful. So, you can see that there is a purpose in telling these stories. Very often, when the time comes for the person concerned to think that they understand the plan of Allah ﷻ, a new development extends the plan or brings it to an unexpected end, like those extra ten days. Trust is not based on assumption, or rules and regulations, or even admonitions, but on experience and humility. Challenging circumstances can draw forth one’s essential character so that the goodness of one’s character outweighs the attractions of this world. It is a challenge for all of us.

LESSONS OF THE PAST

With that introduction, let us turn to the story and circumstances of the Prophet Musa عليه السلام. The ancient Egyptian civilization is one of the oldest recorded civilizations. Three thousand years before the

birth of the Prophet Isa عليه السلام and more than 5,000 years ago, this civilization was extensive, thriving, and complex – a civilization ruled by its Pharaohs, its rituals, and its beliefs about its gods and the materialism of the afterlife. While in Egypt, I saw at the Pyramids and in the Antiquities Museum that much of the focus of the “pharaonic culture” was on death. Everything was preparation for death. Life was an interruption of a continuum toward dying; the collective obsession with death precluded sympathy, and kindness, a sense of social responsibility or humanitarian responses to the needs of the people. Rather than a spiritual preparation for the next life, the emphasis was on a material preparation. The different cults would change: sometimes of the sun and light, sometimes of the night, the moon, and darkness; nonetheless, they were all preparations for death. Life was only a time to gather and prepare material belongings. You only had this brief life to prepare for an eternal death with your collected possessions. So people were enslaved to help the pharaohs do that.

That is the society into which the Prophet Musa عليه السلام was born. A society ruled by a pharaoh that Qur’an calls an “arrogant evil-doer” [10:75]. As we know, Pharaoh persecuted his people, especially the Bani Isra’eel:

إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضِعُّ طَائِفَةً
مِنْهُمْ يُدَبِّحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

INNA FIR‘AWNA ‘ALĀ FI-L-‘ARDI WA JA‘ALA
AHLAHĀ SHIYA‘ĀNY-YASTAD‘IFU TĀA‘IFATAM-
MINHUM YUDḥABBIḤU AB‘NĀA‘AHUM WA
YASTAHYĪ NISĀA‘AHUM INNAHU KĀNA MINA-L-
MUFSIDĪN.

Surely Pharaoh exalted himself on the earth and made its people into factions. [One] group of them he weakened by sacrificing their sons [while] keeping their women alive. He was truly a corrupter. [28:4]

The results of corruption and abusing power are seen in many of the stories of Musa عليه السلام and his predecessors: the people of Nuh, and 'Ad, and Thamud, Ibrahim, Madyan. The people of 'Ad had great power and reputation (7:69), but they became "vain" and "acted like tyrants" (26:128-30); the people of Thamud who succeeded them acted in a similar way. Musa and Harun were sent to the Pharaoh because he had "exceeded all bounds" (20:43), and "made himself high and mighty in the land and divided people into different groups, oppressing a group, slaughtering their sons" (28:4) while favoring the other group. All these tyrannies were similar and met a similar fate:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ
إِرمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ
وَتَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَاءُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِ
وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَارِ
الَّذِينَ طَعَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ
فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ
فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمُ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ
إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْمِرْصَادِ

ALAM TARA KAYFA FA-‘ALA RABBUKA BI‘AD¹
IRAMA DhĀTI-L-‘IMĀD¹, ALLATĪ LAM YUKhLAQ¹
MITHLUHĀ FI-L-BILĀD¹
WA ThAMŪDA-LLADhĪNA JĀBŪ AS-ṢAKhRA BI-L-
WA-AD¹
WA FIR‘AWNA DhĪ AL-‘AWTĀD¹
ALLADhĪNA TAGhAW FI-L-BILĀD¹
FA-AKThARŪ FĪHĀ-L-FASĀD¹
FA-ṢABBA ‘ALAYHIM RABBUKA SAWTA ‘ADhĀB¹
INNA RABBAKA LABI-L-MIRSĀD¹.

Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with (the people) of Ad, of Iram, the city of pillars, whose like has never been in any land? And Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley?

And the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? All of them committed excess in the land, and spread corruption there: your Lord let a scourge of Punishment loose on them. Your Lord is always watchful. [89:6-14]

The importance of these ‘aayaat is pretty clear: Allah ﷻ hates tyrants. Power has to be exercised on the basis of mercy and compassion, and be used to uphold justice and equity in all its forms. But there is also the fact that tyranny is perpetuated when rulers assume they have absolute power. In the Qur’an, the word for possessing power or to have power and dominion (*mulk*) is used exclusively for Allah with only two exceptions. *Mulk* (kingdom) and the associated word *malik* (king) are used with reference to Sidna Daud, Suleiman, and Saul where they are said to have a kingdom and described as prophet-rulers. But in all other places *mulk* and *malik* refer only to Allah ﷻ. To assume absolute power is to assume you have power over life and death, to do as you wish, to rule without accountability, to sit in judgment over others, as well as put yourself above the law.

We will see today, as we discuss the Prophet Musa عليه السلام that the true Prophets succeed in understanding humility, in deference, and in walking gingerly and attentively through their life, with piety and repentance. Who rules, and what are the rules of a civil Civil Society is a series of talks I am giving now in other venues, but it is clear that Qur’an provides such guidance on who rules, how they should be chosen, why we should obey the ruler, and when they should not be obeyed. Political leadership is not something that is inherited or automatically conferred on the basis of class or wealth. We see from the Qur’an that the Prophets waged struggles against three types of people. Personified in the story of Musa and Pharaoh, the three are “...the symbols for the ruling elite, the corrupt administrators, and the phenomenally rich who work together to accumulate power, thwart distribution of wealth, and subjugate and marginalize most of society.” So what these Prophets achieved or strived to achieve

millenniums ago we have yet to do in our own time. We need to put into practice today the lessons of the past like Musa, who was instructed:

... أَنْ أَخْرَجَ قَوْمَكَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَذَكَّرَهُمْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ
إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ

... AN AKhRIJ^a QAWMAKA MINA-Dh-DhULUMĀTI
ILĀ-N-NŪRI WA DhAKKIRHUM B'AYYĀMI-LLĀHI
INNA FI DhĀLIKA LĀA'AYĀTIL-LIKULLI
SABBĀRIN SHAKŪR.

...to bring your people out of the depth of darkness into the light, and serve as a reminder for all who are patient and grateful in adversity. (14:5)

If we are to make progress from a Qur'anic basis, it will not be progress if based on wealth or technology or ostentation, but on understanding that

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلٌ فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ لَا يَسْتَأْخِرُونَ سَاعَةً وَلَا
يَسْتَفْتِمُونَ

WA LIKULLI UMMATIN AJALUN FA'IDhĀ JĀA'A
AJALUHUM LĀ YASTA'KHIRŪNA SĀ'ATANW-WA
LĀ YASTAQ'DIMŪN.

...for each community, there is an appointed term, and when it is reached they can neither delay nor hasten it, even for a moment. (7:34)

What is important and in the end is critical is not power but righteous conduct and character— sorely missing today—and it was the goal of the Prophet Muhammad in coming to this world.

THE BEGINNINGS OF FAITH

When we look around our world today, it is not difficult to find repeated the tyranny of Pharaoh. It is not difficult to imagine this tyrant and his soldiers terrorizing the people of Egypt, the daily fear they lived in... and yet Allah ﷻ had a plan:

وَرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ
الْوَارِثِينَ... وَنُرِي فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَجُنُودَهُمَا مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَحْذَرُونَ

WA NURĪDU AN NAMUNNA °ALĀ-LLADhĪNA
ISTUD°IFŪ FI-L-'ARDI WA NAJ°A-°ALAHUM
A'IMMATANW-WA NAJ°A-°ALAHUMU-L-WA-
ARITHĪN...NURIYA FIR°AWNA WA HĀMĀNA WA
JUNŪDAHUMĀ MINHUM MĀ KĀNŪ
YAHdharŪN.

And We wished to show Our Favor on those who were oppressed on the earth, and to make them leaders and to make them the inheritors...to show Pharaoh and [his minister] Haman and their soldiers the [very thing which] they feared. [28:5-6]

There is an incredible subtlety and wisdom in the plans and decree of Allah ﷻ. Those who believe in Allah ﷻ must trust in Allah's plan, even when we don't understand it. This is one of the great themes and examples we see, over and over, in the life of the Prophet Musa عليه السلام, beginning with his birth and the test of his mother's faith. Allah says in Surah 'Ta Ha:

إِذْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى أُمِّكَ مَا يُوحَى
أَنْ أَقْذِفِي فِي التَّابُوتِ فَاقْذِفِي فِي الْيَمِّ فَلْيُلْقِهِ الْيَمُّ بِالسَّاحِلِ يَأْخُذْهُ عَدُوٌّ
لِي وَعَدُوٌّ لَهُ وَالْقَيْتُ عَلَيْكَ حَبَّةٌ مِّنِّي وَلِتُصْنَعَ عَلَى عَيْنِي

IDh AWHAYNĀ ILĀ UMMIKA MĀ YŪHĀ:
 ANI IQ'DhIFĪHI FĪ-T-TĀBŪTI FA-Q'DhIFĪHI FĪ-L-
 YAMMI FA-LYULQIHI-L-YAMMU BI-S-SĀHILI
 YĀ'KhUDhHU 'ADUWWUL-LĪ WA 'ADUWWUL-
 LAHU WA ALQAYTU 'ALAYKA MAHABBATAM-
 MINNĪ WA LITUSNA'A 'ALĀ 'AYNĪ.

We inspired your mother with this revelation:

"Place him in a box and throw it in the river. The river will cast him on the shore, and there an enemy of Me and an enemy to him will adopt him." I cast My Love over you in order that you might be formed under My Eye. [20:38-39]

Umm Musa (Youkabel) wanted to protect and hid her infant son from the soldiers coming to kill him, but she is told by Allah ﷻ to do something that seemed to be the exact opposite of protecting him. She is to put her child in a box and throw him in the river (which would be hard enough for a parent to do), then (assuming he survives this) he will be collected and adopted by an enemy. She is to send him into the arms of the one who wanted to kill him. One can imagine her inner dialogue, her wondering "what if" – "what if I hide him; what if he drowns; what if the enemy kills him anyway..." Allah ﷻ says:

... لَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

... LĀ TAKhĀFĪ WA LĀ TAHZANĪ INNĀ RĀDDŪHU
 ILAYKI WA JĀ'ILŪHU MINA-L-MURSALĪN.

...Do not fear and do not grieve. Indeed, We will cause him to return to you, and We will make him to be from the Messengers. [28:7]

Allah promises her that by putting her son into danger, she is laying the groundwork for a Prophet. I can't tell you; no one can tell you

how she felt even after getting that support, even getting that word. But she threw her baby into the river and trusted in Allah. How many of us would do that? She could have expressed her remorse and misery, but Allah made her a believer. Qur'an tells us how difficult this was for her:

وَأَصْبَحَ فُؤَادُ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ فَارِغًا ۚ إِن كَادَتْ لَتُبْدِي بِهِ لَوْلَا أَن رَّبَطْنَا
 عَلَىٰ قَلْبِهَا لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

WA ASBAHA FU'ADU UMMI MŪSĀ FA-ARIGHĀN
 IN KĀDAT LATUB'DĪ BIHI LAWLĀ AR-RABAT'NĀ
 'ALĀ QALBIHĀ LITAKŪNA MINA-L-MU'MINĪN.

And on the next morn the heart of the mother of Musa was an aching void, and she would have betrayed him had We not made firm her heart that she might be from the believers. [28:10]

What we can understand from this, of course, is that it is natural to feel upset under this and other circumstances, that even when one does exactly what Allah has prescribed for us, even when it is for our own benefit (and the benefit of those we love), it can be heart-wrenchingly difficult. Indeed, she learned a lesson early that it took her son many years to learn and submit to. She was so overcome that she almost revealed Musa's identity. But Allah ﷻ gave her the strength during that time and "made firm her heart," because He intended only good things for her and for the child. It was not written on her page in the Book that she should be unrewarded, or die, or have an emotional breakdown – obviously. But you don't know what's written on that page; you have to still act. Of course, Allah's ﷻ plan came to fruition. The mother sends the sister to watch Musa, who has been adopted by Pharaoh's wife. And because the baby Musa has refused all other wet-nurses, the sister is able to say:

هَلْ أَذِلُّكُمْ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتٍ يَكْفُلُونَهُ لَكُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُ نَاصِحُونَ

HAL ADULLUKUM 'ALĀ AHLI BAYTIN-YAKFULŪNAHU LAKUM WA HUM LAHU NĀSIHŪN.

Shall I show you to the people of a house who will rear him for you and take care of him? [28:12]

She took him and went with the sister to the real mother. "And when her breast was presented to him, he took it and they (the Pharaoh's family) were so happy for this, they hired her to nurse him. And she achieved great happiness and comfort because of him in this life, and even more so in the Hereafter." (According to Ibn Kathir's *tafsir*.)

And so finally we see the plan of Allah:

فَرَدَدْنَاهُ إِلَىٰ أُمِّهِ كَيْ تَقَرَّ عَيْنُهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنَ وَلِتَعْلَمَ أَنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

FA-RADAD⁴NĀHU ILĀ UMMIHI KAY TAQARRA 'AYNUHĀ WA LĀ TAHZANA WA LITA'LAMA ANNA WA 'DA-LLĀHI HAQQUNW-WA LĀKINNA AKTHARAHUM LĀ YA'LAMŪN.

So [by these means,] We restored him to his mother in order that she might be comforted and not grieve, and [so] that she might know that the promise of Allah is true. But most of them do not know. [28:13]

The promise of Allah is true, whatever the promise, but most of them do not know. As Qur'an tells us, even she did not know until the plan had come to fruition. First she had to trust, to submit, to sublimate not only her fear, but also the natural concerns of a mother. Very few people really get to the point of trusting, let alone see the fruit of their trust. "But most of the people do not know." Not that they reject; they don't know, don't know in their hearts that

Allah ﷻ will always take care of those who love Him and those whom He loves. They don't know that Allah ﷻ is present, that Allah ﷻ is aware of every situation. They don't know that whatever His plan is, it's better than your plan. They (we) don't know that whatever He promises comes true, until we know. Instead of complete trust in Allah ﷻ, we believe we have to take care of ourselves, make our own plans, "hedge our bets," just in case Allah ﷻ was wrong and the basket tips over in the river, just in case the wrong person picked up the basket. It sounds silly when we think of this in the context of the story of Musa ﷺ, but isn't that what we do in our own lives, looking for 'back doors' and second-guessing Allah's plan for us?

Certainly, we can blame it on ourselves and say, "I'm not really sure what Allah's plan is for me. I don't know that I really understood Allah's instructions. Maybe He gave me this anxiety, or struggle, or trial, as a sign that I should be doing something else, or going somewhere else, or maybe this is just a test." But nowhere in this story of Musa's mother, Youkabed, as recounted by Qur'an, does it say that it was easy for her, or that she didn't have doubts. In fact, we are specifically told of the aching void of her heart, and that she had so much doubt and anxiety that she almost betrayed her son and Allah ﷻ. What can we learn from this example? We are cared for; but we have to move toward Allah ﷻ before He comes running toward us. Taking that first step is the most important. For Youkabed, that first step was a big one. Taking that first step, spiritually, under any circumstance, is always the most difficult one. When you do take it, Allah takes care of the rest.

Many of us should contemplate whether we have ever really taken the first step in trusting Allah ﷻ. There are many "first steps" in our lives: the first step toward seeking out the truth; the first step toward getting healthy, or losing weight in the proper way; the first step toward getting a job; the first step toward healing a wound; the first step toward asking for forgiveness, or toward forgiving. It's always the first step that is most difficult. When you trust in Allah, He will give you the strength and the perseverance to remain patient.

JOURNEYS WITHIN JOURNEYS

I began by repeating this story in great detail, because this early life experience of Musa عليه السلام and the choices his mother made introduce a theme that we see repeated over and over in the life of the Prophet Musa عليه السلام, for virtually all the Prophets, a theme of trial, test, trust, and ultimate submission. Sidna Musa عليه السلام must trust Allah عز وجل, not knowing how things will turn out. He is instructed to follow Allah عز وجل, without knowing what the consequences will be. He must quiet his questioning mind, and trust that what doesn't make sense to him, what looks wrong or illogical, is right, because it is by Allah's will. This is the lesson that the Guide Khidr is sent to teach him. This is the attitude he must adopt when he sees a bush burning in the desert. This is the trust he must achieve when he goes to Pharaoh, the god-like ruler of Egypt to tell him he is a tyrant (and remember he is not going to a stranger). And this is the complete submission and humility he must have felt as he is leading his people, pursued by an entire army. They reach the sea, with nowhere to run or hide as far as the eye can see—[and there is] trust in and submission to Allah's plan.

Still we realize and perhaps can relate to the fact that he was not a passive human being; rather, his temperament is one more of fire, and fire plays an important role in his own purification. He faced many challenges and made what are, apparently, mistakes. Rarely do we hear about Prophets being wrong or making mistakes, but we see this in the life of the Prophet Musa عليه السلام. We can understand that these early lessons in humility, indicative of all human frailty, laid the foundation for the trust and submission to Allah عز وجل for him that it lays for us in the same kind of circumstances. What was needed for him to complete his duties as a messenger is needed for us to complete our duties as believers. *Inshaa'a-Llaah*, we can find comfort in his example in our own journey of purification and submission, trust and patience, and repentance.

When we look at the life of the Prophet Musa عليه السلام, about whom so much is said in the Qur'an, we see that he evolved to this level of trust, by Allah's plan, through a series of personal journeys (inner and

outer)—a journey on the river, a journey out of Egypt, on Mount Sinai, a journey back to Egypt, and then again out of Egypt.

In Surah at-Tawbah, Allah says:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ
أَعْظَمُ دَرَجَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ

ALLADHĪNA ĀMANŪ WA HĀJARŪ WA JĀHADŪ FĪ
SABĪLI-LLĀHI BĪ'AMWĀLIHIM WA ANFUSIHIM
A'DHAMU DARAJATAN 'INDA-LLĀHI
WA'ULĀA'IKA HUMU-L-FĀA'IZŪN.

Those who believe and suffer exile, and strive with might and main in Allah's cause with their goods and their persons have the highest rank in the sight of Allah. They are the people who will achieve salvation. [9:20]

Who are they? First they have to believe, and second they have to suffer exile. What we learn from this *āyat*, and what is important to note, is that you can also see the theme of *hijrah* in the lives of all of these Prophets. Prophet Adam عليه السلام migrates from the state of perfection to this world of imperfection. The Prophet Nūh عليه السلام migrates upon the sea when everything is destroyed. The world disappears to reemerge cleansed—it is submerged, and re-emerges. The Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام leaves his homeland, and sends Hajar to Mecca, which becomes the ultimate site of migration for all Muslims for all time. The Prophet Musa عليه السلام makes the *hijrah* from Egypt to a new and hopeful, peaceful, and free land. It's called the Holy Land by the Jews, but it is Canaan to the Canaanites, Palestine for the Palestinians; and still today it is not peaceful, despite the City of Peace being within it. Prophet Isa عليه السلام leaves for 30-some years, and comes back to fulfill a mission of love and self-sacrifice; and his migration is a migration from this world to Paradise. The Prophet Muhammad, of course, makes the *hijrah* from Mecca to Medina, and returns back to Mecca to establish Islam in the lives and hearts of the people.

The *hijrah* is not just limited to the history of Islam or to Muslims, and it's not just the physical movement. It's also a social and political movement. It had its impact on the civilizations of the world. We'll talk more about that when we speak of Prophet Muhammad. It is a search for a much more favorable environment, a place where one can continue to make constructive effort and progress. It is also moving from ignorance to knowledge, from insecurity to security, from disbelief to Islam. With that context in mind, I would like to take a few moments now to reflect on some of the specific inner and outer journeys that Sidna Musa عليه السلام made. Qur'an tells us in Surah al-Qasas that in his youth, Musa عليه السلام killed an Egyptian man:

وَدَخَلَ الْمَدِينَةَ عَلَى حِينٍ غَفْلَةٍ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا فَوَجَدَ فِيهَا رَجُلَيْنِ
يَقْتَتِلَانِ هَذَا مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ وَهَذَا مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَاسْتَعَاثَ الَّذِي مِنْ
شِيعَتِهِ عَلَى الَّذِي مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَوَكَرَهُ مُوسَى فَقَضَى عَلَيْهِ قَالَ هَذَا
مِنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ مُضِلٌّ مُبِينٌ قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ
نَفْسِي فَاعْفِرْ لِي فَعَفَرَ لَهُ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

WA DAKhALA-L-MADĪNATA 'ALĀ HĪNĪ
GhAFLATIM-MIN AHLIHĀ FA-WAJADA FĪHĀ
RAJULAYNĪ YAQ'TATILĀNĪ HĀDhĀ MIN
SHĪ'ATIHI WA HĀDhĀ MIN 'ADUWWIHI FA-
STAGHĀTHAHU-LLADhĪ MIN SHĪ'ATIHI 'ALĀ-
LLADhĪ MIN 'ADUWWIHI FA-WAKAZAHU MŪSĀ
FA-QADĀ 'ALAYHI QĀLA HĀDhĀ MIN 'AMALI-SH-
SHAYTĀNĪ INNAHU 'ADUWWUM-MUDILLUM-
MUBĪN. QĀLA RABBI INNĪ DhĀLAMTU NAFSĪ
FA-GhFIR LĪ FA-GhAFARA LAHU INNAHU HUWA-
L-GhAFŪRU-R-RAḤĪM.

And [one day] he entered the city when its people were [resting in their houses and] heedless [of what was going on in the streets], and he found two men fighting with one another—this one from his partisans and that one from his enemy—and the one from his partisans

cried out for help against the one [who was] from his enemy—so Musa struck him with his fist and [unintentionally] dispatched him [from the world]. He said [to] himself, “This is the work of Shaytan! Surely, he is an enemy [who] clearly misleads!” He said, “My Lord, I have oppressed my self, so forgive me!” Then He forgave him, for He is Ever-Forgiving, the Singularly Compassionate. [28: 15-16]

He seeks and receives Allah's forgiveness, but he is advised to leave Egypt to escape the people's revenge. Allah says in Surah al-Qasas:

فَخَرَجَ مِنْهَا خَائِفًا يَتَرَقَّبُ قَالَ رَبِّ نَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ
وَلَمَّا تَوَجَّهَ تِلْقَاءَ مَدْيَنَ قَالَ عَسَى رَبِّي أَنْ يَهْدِيَنِي سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ

WA JĀA'A RAJULUM-MIN AQ'SĀ-L-MADĪNATI
YAS'Ā QĀLA YĀ MŪSĀ INNA-L-MALĀ
YA'TAMIRŪNA BIKĀ LIYAQ'TULŪKA FA-KhRUJ
INNĪ LAKA MINA-N-NĀSIHĪN.

FA-KhARAJA MINHĀ KhĀA'IFĀNY-
YATARAQQABU QĀLA RABBI NAJJINĪ MINA-L-
QAWMI-Dh-DhĀLIMĪN.

And a man from the outermost part of the city came, running. He said, “O Musa, the chiefs are conferring against you [and intend] to kill you, so get out of the city now, for surely I wish you well!” So he went out from it—fearful—vigilant. He said, “My Lord, save me from the people [who would] oppress [me]!” [28:20-21]

And so begins the first (or second, if you want to count his journey down the river in a basket) journey of Musa, a journey he must undertake with humility, even fear. Not knowing where he will go, he ends up in Madyan, where he begins the next phase of his life. There, he turns to Allah and says:

رَبِّ إِنِّي لِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ

RABBI INNĪ LIMĀ AÑZALTA ILAYYA MIN
KhAYRIŦ FAQĪR.

My Lord, surely, I am needy of whatever good You send
down for me. [28:24]

Is there anybody here who has not been in a situation where you just had to turn to Allah and say, "I don't know what to do next. It's up to You. I've thought of everything. I've done everything. I don't know what to do next."? Wouldn't it have been great if we had thought [to turn to Allah] first instead of last?

By Allah's plan, he meets and marries the daughter of a righteous old man, the Prophet Shu'ayb عليه السلام, and stayed with him for ten years. Throughout that period, Musa had no Divine mission. He was just a person who escaped, and lived as a good man, a righteous person, a husband, and generous son-in-law. It is clear from the reflective and personal "conversations" recounted in Qur'an that Sidna Musa عليه السلام, at the various cross-roads of his life—asking for forgiveness, asking for guidance—has already been selected by Allah ﷻ as one of His intimate friends. But at some point Musa عليه السلام feels a pull to search for and further his knowledge; thus, begins a third journey to find the Guide Khidr عليه السلام. In Surah al-Kahf, Allah ﷻ describes how the Prophet Musa resolved to go on traveling until he could meet and attain knowledge from Khidr عليه السلام. It is a journey that through forgetfulness, and abstraction, and curiosity leads them to Khidr عليه السلام.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِفَتَاهُ لَا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّى أَبْلُغَ بَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِي
حُقُبًا

WA'IDh QĀLA MŪSĀ LIFATĀHU LĀ AB^āRAHU
HATTĀ AB^āLUGhA MAJ^āMA^ā-L-BAHRAINI AW
AMDIYA HUQUBĀ.

And [remember] when [in the course of his travels]
Musa said to his servant boy, "I won't stop [traveling]
until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if I
have to go on for ages. [18:60]

(It is interesting that it is "where the two seas meet," and then it becomes "the one sea that parts into two seas" later.) As we hear from this quote in Surah al-Kahf, he had a young boy with him throughout that whole journey. His name was Yusha (Joshua) bin Nuun. They were close companions. The word for the young lad means "youth in the prime of life." That implies that some boy, who was probably between his teens and young adult-hood, plays a significant role in this journey. At one point in this journey, bin Nuun informs the Prophet Musa عليه السلام how the fish, which they had caught (and was dead), had escaped and taken a route to the sea, and how Shaytan had made him forget to inform him before this.

أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوْفَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ الْحُوتَ وَمَا أَنسَانِيهِ إِلَّا
الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا

ARĀYTA IDh AWAYNĀ ILĀ-S-SAKhrATI FA'INNĪ
NASĪTU-L-HŪTA WA MĀ AÑSĀNIHU ILLĀ-SH-
SHAYTĀNU AN ADhKURAHU WA-TTAKhADhA
SABĪLAHU FI-L-BAHRI 'AJABĀ.

Did you see what happened when we took ourselves to
the rock? I did indeed forget about the fish. None but
Shaytan made me forget to tell you about it. It took its
course to the sea in a marvelous way. [18:63]

But of course this "forgetfulness" is in itself a sign to Sidna Musa عليه السلام, who responds not with anger, but joy and happiness. He recognizes that the escape of the assumed dead fish into the water, after coming back to life, was meant to be a sign from Allah that they had reached a place where they would find Khidr. When this young boy told him this, the Prophet Musa replied, "This is that which we

have been seeking.” And they both retraced their steps to the point in order to finally find and meet Khidr عليه السلام.

There are a lot of things that we can learn from something like this. We see how nature, at the beck and call of Allah ﷻ, serves the Prophet, indeed the *awliyyaa'u-Llaah*. Even in the search for knowledge, Allah will provide the experience needed to blunt our arrogance. Particularly poignant in this story is the role of the young boy. The companionship with those who are pure and observant, inquisitive and still humble, not tainted by life, brings benefit. Children and those who live a life of service maintain more of such purity and simplicity. But it required the Prophet Musa's patience and tolerance to discern the meaning of the loss of the fish. And so, as you well know, Khidr عليه السلام is discovered, and Musa عليه السلام asks to be his student and follow him. Khidr عليه السلام replies:

قَالَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ
بِهِ خُبْرًا

QĀLA INNAKA LAN TASTATI'Ā MA'ĪYA ṢAB'RĀ.
WA KAYFA TASBIRU 'ALĀ MĀ LAM TUHIT^a BIHI
KHUB'RĀ.

Surely, you will not be able to be patient with me. For how can you have patience with that which your knowledge cannot encompass. [18:67-68]

To which Musa عليه السلام replies:

سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَا أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا

SATAJIDUNĪ IN SHĀĀ'A-LLĀHU ṢĀBIRANW-WA
LĀ A'Ī LAKA AMRĀ.

Allah willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey any order of yours. [18:69]

But, as we know, Musa عليه السلام is not able to be patient or to obey when Khidr عليه السلام does various things, which appear to be wrong or illogical, but are part of Allah's ﷻ plan. Three times Musa has to be humbled and learn this lesson from Khidr عليه السلام—first with the sinking of the boat, next when Khidr عليه السلام kills the young man, and finally with the rebuilding of the wall—until Khidr عليه السلام says to him:

هَذَا فِرَاقُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِتَأْوِيلِ مَا لَمْ تَسْتَطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا

HĀDHĀ FIRĀQU BAYNĪ WA BAYNIKA
SA'UNABBI'UKA BITA'WĪLI MĀ LAM TASTATI'
'ALAYHI ṢAB'RĀ.

This is the parting between you and me. [But first] I will tell you the inner meaning of that which you could not bear with patience. [18:78]

I encourage you to take the time to read the entire story, as recounted in Qur'an (Surah al-Kahf, *'aayaats* 60-82). It is a beautiful account of student and teacher, perceptions and misperceptions, assumptions, humility, and learning brought by real knowledge—a lesson that is given anyway, but would have been understood in a much better way had he been patient. Often, we say to people, “It would be better if you asked than if I offered.” I'm sure that those of us who are asked often to make *du'aa* for people have said to certain people, “It would be good if you got a *du'aa* before you endeavored to do such and such a thing. And it would have been better had you asked than if it was just offered.”

FACING OUR INNER PHARAOH

Perhaps it is these lessons from Khidr عليه السلام that prepare Sidna Musa عليه السلام for the responsibilities and challenges he must take on later in

life—from the surreal experience of the burning bush and the instruction from Allah ﷻ that he must go and face Pharaoh, to being the leader of his people, to being a Messenger of Allah ﷻ. His life as Messenger of Allah ﷻ begins with another journey, one that takes him to Mount Sinai.

فَلَمَّا قَضَىٰ مُوسَى الْأَجَلَ وَسَارَ بِأَهْلِهِ آنَسَ مِنْ جَانِبِ الطُّورِ
نَارًا ...

FA-LAMMĀ QADĀ MŪSĀ-L-'AJALA WA SĀRA
BI'AHLIHI ĀNĀSA MIN JĀNIBI-T-TŪRI NĀRĀN...

Then when Musa had completed his term and was traveling with his family, he saw from the side of Mount Sinai a fire... [28:29]

On Jabal i 'Tur (Mount Sinai), Allah ﷻ transforms the life and person of the Prophet Musa ﷺ. After completing his term of promised service to his father-in-law, he sees from the side of Mount Sinai a fire and senses it is both a source of knowledge and warmth; and of course, it turns out to be the voice of Allah ﷻ.

فَلَمَّا أَتَاهَا نُودِيَ مِنْ شَاطِئِ الْوَادِ الْأَيْمَنِ فِي الْبُقْعَةِ الْمُبَارَكَةِ مِنَ
الشَّجَرَةِ أَنْ يَا مُوسَى إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

FA-LAMMĀ ATĀHĀ NŪDIYA MIN SHĀTĪ'I-L-WA-
ADI-L-'AYMANI FI-L-BUQ¹-°ATI-L-MUBĀRAKATI
MINA-SH-SHAJARATI AŅY-YĀ MŪSĀ INNĪ ANĀ-
LLĀHU RABBU-L-°ĀLAMĪN.

And when he reached [the place] he was called from the right side of the valley, out of the tree [burning] on blessed ground, "Oh Musa! Truly, I am Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!" [28:30]

And he is told by Allah ﷻ to throw down his staff and it becomes a snake, and he...

...مُذْبِرًا وَلَمْ يُعَقِّبْ يَا مُوسَى أَقْبِلْ وَلَا تَخَفْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الْآمِينَ

...MUD'BIRĀN-WA LAM YU°AQQIB¹ YĀ MŪSĀ
AQ¹BIL WA LĀ TAKhAF INNAKA MINA-L-
'ĀMINĪN.

...turned in flight and did not look back [until he heard], "Oh Musa, come near and do not fear. Surely, you are from those who are secure [both] in this world and the final one. [28:31]

Again and again, Musa ﷺ must face his fears, his fear of death (like his fear of Pharaoh), and his need for proof in conflict with his trust and duty. When he is ordered by Allah ﷻ to face Pharaoh, first he says he is afraid. He can't go back to Egypt, because he killed someone and, "I fear they will kill me." When Allah ﷻ addresses that fear, he expresses another fear, that he will be inarticulate and the people will deny him and ridicule him:

أَخِي هَازُونُ هُوَ أَفْصَحُ مِنِّي لِسَانًا فَأَرْسَلْهُ مَعِيَ رِدْءًا يُصَدِّقُنِي إِنِّي
أَخَافُ أَنْ يُكَذِّبُونِ

AKHĪ HĀRŪNU HUWA AFSĀHU MINNĪ LISĀNĀN
FA-ARSILHU MA'YA RID'AŅY-YUSADDIQUŅĪ
INNĪ AKhĀFU AŅY-YUKADh-DhIBŪN.

My brother has a more fluent tongue than I, so send him with me as a helper to confirm [what I say,] for surely, I fear that they will deny me. [28:34]

Allah ﷻ says:

سَنَشُدُّ عَضُدَكَ بِأَخِيكَ...

SANASHUDDU 'ADUDAKA BI'AKHĪKA...

We will strengthen your arm with your brother... [28:35]

And so, Musa and Harun ﷺ go together to face Pharaoh:

اَذْهَبْ اَنْتَ وَاَخُوكَ بِآيَاتِي وَلَا تَنِيَا فِي ذِكْرِي
اَذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ
فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَىٰ

IDhHAB ANTA WA AKhÜKA BI'AYÄTĪ WA LÄ
TANIYÄ FĪ DhIKRĪ.

IDhHABÄ ILÄ FIR'AWNA INNAHU TAGhÄ
FA-QÜLÄ LAHU QAWLAL-LAYYINAL-LA'ALLAHU
YATADhAKKARU AW YAKhSHÄ.

Go—you and your brother—with My Signs—and never
tire in My remembrance.

Go to Pharaoh, for he has exceeded all limits. And
speak to him with gentle speech so that he might
remember or [at least] be fearful. [20:42-44]

There is a long discussion in Surah 'Ta Ha between Sidna Musa ﷺ
and Sidna Harun ﷺ and Pharaoh and his advisors. But of course,
as we know, in the end Pharaoh did not listen:

فَتَوَلَّىٰ فِرْعَوْنُ فَجَمَعَ كَيْدَهُ ثُمَّ أَتَىٰ

FA-TAWALLÄ FIR'AWNU FA-JAMA'A KAYDAHU
ThUMMA ATÄ.

So Pharaoh withdrew and put together his plot—and
then he came forth. [20:60]

Are we surprised? How many people are not listening? Not just us,
but all these pharaohs in the world, who don't listen, who don't see,
who don't care, who are obsessed with power, and they don't
understand they are being obsessed with death. Pharaoh withdrew
and then came forth with his plot. Here we see the juxtaposition of
Musa's ﷺ example, his trust in Allah and submission to His plan;
and Pharaoh, who believed he could (and tried to) plot his way out of
every situation. It is a commentary on power and corruption versus
human aspiration and rights and responsibilities given by Allah ﷻ—
Light and Dark, materiality and transcendent eternity. Money can't
buy you everything. The Pharaoh's search for eternal life in death is
contrasted against the promise of eternity and peace in the Light,
Nur-i-Allah. "With hardship goes ease, with hardship goes ease" and
so, conversely, with ease and power only hardship follows.

Surely, Musa ﷺ faced hardship as he followed the plan of Allah ﷻ,
but he also experienced the freedom in this hardship. For how many
decades had people lived a life of fear and oppression, to the point
where they don't even know what a life free from fear and
oppression looked or felt like? How many years do you have to live
under oppression for that to happen—twenty, thirty, fifty, seventy-
five, a hundred? Sidna Musa ﷺ faced his own fears, with Allah's
help, and thus was able to face and defeat the ruler who the entire
nation feared. Through that trial of fire, he was able lead the people
to a life ruled not by fear of death, but by remembrance of Allah ﷻ,
and hope of light. In some sense, what the Prophets do is to show us
how to face our fears and overcome them. Certainly, the Prophet
Ibrahim ﷺ had to face his fears and overcome them. The Prophet
Nuh ﷺ had to face the flood and the fear of the loss of his
community and family. Hazrat Adam ﷺ had to face the human
fear of mortality, and Prophet Muhammad came down from the
mountain shaking and fearful. But from this experience, he gives
strength to others, because he found his strength within his soul, his
faith, his heart, based on trust.

We have the keys to be free, to make meaning out of our lives, to live
a good life, to have good things, to live in a good way, to have good
friends, to have good marriage partners, to have wonderful children.

We have this choice, if we choose it, or we can choose to live in anxiety and fear. Even if we choose it, it's we who are choosing. Everyone has their own destiny, so we have to trust in Allah. These Israelites, as they were called, were freed; but did they ever – even after such a long, long time – ever feel free, or act free? Where is freedom today? Freedom cannot only be based on power and not on faith, on separation and not on unity.

WHAT ARE WE STRIVING FOR? INNER AND OUTER FREEDOM

We sit here today re-telling these stories of Sidna Musa ﷺ, stories told to us in Qu'ran of a man who never stopped striving – striving to overcome his fears, striving to gain knowledge, striving to improve the character and situation of his people. We have to ask ourselves, what am I striving for, individually and as part of the collective humanity? What am I asking of Allah; what am I offering to our Creator? What am I afraid of? What do I stand for? Do I stand for what I believe just for myself, for my own place in Paradise, or for the sake of others, for the sake of the Essence that is Allah ﷻ? Where am I going? Where am I coming from?

We are coming from *Tareeqah*, from Islam, and from the core of truth from the heart. We are asleep, or in a coma, and Allah sends us a wakeup call, an alarm, but we push the snooze button and wait until the next alarm. We can set it for 5 minutes or 10 minutes, or if you have a really good one, 30 minutes. The collective wakeup call of humanity has many names: Adam, Nuuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Jesus/ Isa, Muhammad. Eventually, it has another name: the Mahdi (peace and blessings on all of them). We get personalized wake up calls too. You say, "Listen, I have a big important meeting tomorrow. Will you wake me up, please?" "Why don't you set your alarm?" "I will, but please wake me up." So you go and wake up the person and they say, "Leave me alone! Don't bother me!" Nobody ever likes the person who wakes them up. It's called "kill the messenger." "I'm doing what you asked me to do! Waking you up!" "Well... I have my alarm set. I don't need you." We get a personalized wake-up call that is a sign to us. We were asleep and He woke us up. We were

worshiping the deities of this life, of this world, and we preferred our material possessions, our name and fame to a free soul. After each wake-up call, how long we stay awake and how we use our wakeful time is up to us. We will heed the call, seize the opportunity or not, seek out knowledge or not, repent or not, calm the fire of our passions or not, serve or not. Such is the essence of the story of Sidna Musa. Story after story tells a similar story. Here is one of these many stories:

Once, the Prophet Musa ﷺ became ill. The Bani Israel came to him and realizing what his illness was, advised him: "If you consume such and such medicine, you will recover from your sickness."

"I shall not seek any cure, but will instead wait until Allah cures me without the help of any medicine," said Musa.

His illness became prolonged, whereupon Allah revealed to him: "By My Majesty and Glory! I shall never cure you until you have consumed the medicine which they recommended for you."

Musa took the medicine and shortly thereafter regained his health. But the incident left Musa with a feeling of complaint and dejection until Allah revealed to him: "You desired to annul My wisdom by means of your trust in Me! Is there one, other than Me, who has placed the medicinal and beneficial effect in plants and various things?"

As we listen to these stories today, we should ask, "What is it I am supposed to learn, and how can I change myself?" We are conditioned to believe that the enemy is outside of us, when the enemy is *inside* of us, really. It's our own fears and our own desires. We felt the enemy had power over us, but that is just an illusion. That is the lesson that Sidna Musa had to learn. He thought the enemy as Pharaoh, but it was really his fear of Pharaoh that was the enemy. The real battle was to overcome his own fears and weaknesses, alone on the mountain. The enemy is inside of us, and all the external enemies are only a manifestation of our own internal enemies. They are projections. If we want to conquer the enemies of disease, poverty, fear, and doubt, then we have to conquer what's inside of us, the breeding ground for those feelings. We have to find

the will to breed the good feelings and the truth, not the dis-ease and the viruses.

I'll do a quick calculation. In the amount of time the three of us have been speaking (about 6 hours)... what's 6 times 1,369?... 8,200 people in Egypt alone contracted Hepatitis C. Half a million people will contract it each year, just in Egypt. We have to conquer the pharaoh inside of us to stand up to those situations. It doesn't always have to take the face of a human being; it may take the face of a minister of something, or a president of that, or a bank that doesn't make a loan, or people who won't be taught how to clean up, or garbage on the streets. We have to face that and change that, because thousands upon thousands of people are dying. Yes, of course we care about when 20 people are killed, or an airplane goes down or a boat sinks, even that one boy in the forest who is killed, or the people on the boat. But think about 500,000 cases, 40 percent of which are carriers in the population. We learn from Allah that the enemy is inside of us, and all those external enemies are only a manifestation of those internal ones. That's why Allah says, **"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change themselves."**

First, change what is in yourself. Isn't that what all the prophets had to do? Just like Musa's mother we have to first conquer our fears and trust in Allah ﷻ. First we have to conquer envy, greed, selfishness and doubt, and shirk and fear, hope and dependence on anything other than Allah ﷻ. Allah shows us that the root of all our diseases and our oppression is within us. Before we can defeat the Pharaoh of our life, we have to defeat the Pharaoh inside of us. We all have to learn or have had to learn how to overcome oppressing ourselves. Most of us oppress our self every day, but we don't believe it. We blame others, or circumstance, but Allah ﷻ is not oppressing us. We are oppressing our self with that burst of anger, fear, doubt, or accusation that deflects it from us. Ibn 'Taymiyya says, *"The one who is truly imprisoned is the one whose heart is imprisoned from Allah; and a captivated one is the one whose desires have enslaved him."* "One whose desires have enslaved him"—how many people in this world are enslaved by their desires, dominated by the Pharaoh of materialism, the Pharaoh of greed, of self-serving independence? When you are

free inside, you are free outside. If you are free inside, you never allow anyone (even your own *nafs*) to take your freedom away from you. When you have inner freedom, you can look into the eyes of the Pharaoh, whatever he looks like. You can look them in the eye, and say, as Sidna Musa عليه السلام said to his people when a raging and powerful Pharaoh threatened them with death:

اسْتَعِينُوا بِاللَّهِ وَاصْبِرُوا إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ لِلَّهِ

ISTA'INŪ BI-LLĀHI WA-SBIRŪ INNA-L-'ARDA LI-LLĀHI...

Seek help in Allah and be patient. Surely, the earth [belongs] to Allah... [7:128]

When you are free within yourself, no one can make a slave of you, because you can only enslave a person who is attached to things. You can only threaten a person who is afraid of losing something. You have only power over someone when they need or want something from you. But there is one thing that no person has the power to take away from you, and that's Allah's Mercy and Power and Patience and Truth. Allah gives us the formula for success in Qur'an with two elements: *sabr*/ patience, perseverance, and *taqwa*/humility.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

YĀ AYYUHĀ-LLADHĪNA AMANŪ ISBIRŪ WA SĀBIRŪ WA RĀBITŪ WA-TTAQŪ ALLĀHA LA'ALLAKUM TUFLIHŪN.

O you who have believed, persevere and endure and remain stationed, fear Allah alone that you may be successful. [3:200]

It is a formula that still works today. The fight for freedom, inner and outer, is an enduring human experience. The fight to free the African Americans from their de jure and de facto enslavement and inequality in the 1960's, a hundred years after they were freed by Lincoln, was the key for me finding the path of how to free myself. I went out to march for their rights as a "do-gooder," and I came back as someone who had to reflect on the truth of my own prejudice and ignorance. And I found the spiritual path, the path of justice and love, and a commitment to more than just myself as a result of Selma, Birmingham, and Atlanta.

SELFLESSNESS OF THE AMBIYAA

This brings me to the last theme that I will cover today, the theme of selfless service, a theme that can be seen clearly in the life of Sidna Musa ﷺ as in the lives of all the other Great Prophets ﷺ. In preparing for this talk today, I was thinking about the lives of the *ambiyaa*, and all the different things you can learn about their lives. Their piety, their sacrifices, their test and trials – we have talked about those. What links them together? One thing is their selflessness. Their lives are truly and it seems naturally selfless. Virtually all of them were concerned with saving the lives of people, not just their 'souls,' but also their day to day livelihood and well-being. It was not about creating a religion, and hence name and fame. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ made it clear he didn't come to create a new religion, but to affirm and uplift character. No prophet really ever came to create a religion. Their intent and instruction was to affirm the Divine Presence and to show a way to worship, and to reflect that Presence in their life, moment to moment. Ultimately, their, and our struggle, is to bring forth the core of our natural essential goodness and reflect that in our life, decisions, and actions. For that, we need (and have been provided with) examples: different types of human beings, under diverse circumstances, with personalities that are different also.

So when we step back and look at the Prophets that we are studying in this series, we see many lives, many people, many different forms of character, but with similar selflessness. We see a diversity and a similarity that we can identify with and uncover for ourselves. Today,

I won't go into the unique aspects of the *lataa'if* (the subtle organs of perception), but it is necessary to mention that each *lateefah*—*galb*, *ruuh*, *sirr*, *kehafee*, *akhsaa*, and then *nafs*, and the four elements—has a Prophet associated with it. The realizations or perceptions of each *lateefah* have an intimate relationship which reflects the unique characteristics and potentiality, the intuitive capabilities, and the abilities within our own selves to resonate with those Prophets individually and collectively in *subbat* and meditation. We see movement and transition and transformation, and how they transcended the limitations of circumstance and the vicissitudes of life as thematic realities in their lives and indeed in our challenges.

How do I or you follow in their footsteps, *fee sabeeli-Llaah*? We must purify our hearts. We must be humble. We must defer to the word and the spirit of the Qur'an and to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and we must assume we don't know before we assume we know. Decisions made for the sake of Allah are not usually easy ones. This is what Allah ﷻ so clearly shows us in the life of Musa ﷺ. The right decisions are not easy decisions. But when you make them, and you are faced with them, and you know what you are doing, you are in the sway of these Prophets. You see through, you hear through, and you understand through the refined *lataa'if*. Your life takes on certain characteristics; moreover, you have a guide, who has a guide, who had a guide to the doorstep of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, through Imam Ali ﷺ, and through Abu Bakr ﷺ. You listen for the voice of truth, that calming voice of love and reason and humility and patience; and you love the sweetness of that voice even before you hear it. You know, "If I hear that voice, I will recognize it." That's the truth we all seek. That's what you are attempting to do by coming here, by coming here today, every time we gather in this *subbat*, when we gather in Bedford at the *kehanaqah* there, when you gather here when there's no program, when you sit with your *shaykh*, and when you sit in the company of good people, believers. Let me share a brief poem from Rumi that speaks to the inner yearning of the heart:

*I want to see you
Know your voice*

*Recognize you when you
first come 'round the corner*

*Sense your scent when I come
into a room you've just left*

*Know the lift of your heel,
the glide of your foot.*

*Become familiar with the way
you purse your lips
then let them part,
just the slightest bit,
when I lean in to your space
and kiss you.*

*I want to know the joy
of how you whisper, "More"
— Rumi*

CONCLUSION: OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES AS PURIFICATION

All the obstacles we are facing as individuals, the challenges, and the crossroads in our lives are only illusions, but they sure seem real. And we don't get a lot of peace from knowing they are illusions, just like Musa's mother didn't get a lot of peace from not knowing, from hearing that everything would be all right, until she saw and experienced it, until the truth was brought back to her after she made that sacrifice, that trust. They are there to test us and test our will, and to test our resolve to be good spiritual human beings, good Muslims, good Sufis, and good servants. They are there to train us in how to act. They are also there for *at-tazkiyyat*, to revive us and purify us. But most of all, they are signs and reminders that all goodness and success and fulfillment come from Allah ﷻ, from surrendering and

trusting in Allah ﷻ. Accepting that your fate is written by the pen of Allah ﷻ is the first step in making good choices.

The goal and message today is to trust in Allah ﷻ and not be so attached to the world and worldly things, and the worldly worries, and the worldly desires, and the desires—the desires that are apparently justifiable, rational, reasonable, and just happen to be in coherence and resonance with what I want. Of course, therefore, they make perfect sense. Know that the spiritual life always suffers unless you put it first. And when it suffers you forget about its value. When you forget about its value, you are no better than the Pharaoh: living to die, accumulating wealth and power, having no values or concern for others, for this creation, and for the covenant with Allah ﷻ. "That's not how I am, Shaykh! I do care. I have values." Keep putting the world first. When does it all end? When you stop remembering, like the story of Imam al Ghazali:

"When I sin, what happens?" The angel writes down the sin. "If I repent, what happens?" It erases it. "And if I do the same sin again?" The angel writes it down. "And if I repent?" The angel erases it. "And if I sin a third time?" The angel writes it down. "How long does this go on?" Until you forget to repent.

None of us should be so arrogant to think that we cannot become totally ignorant of what's happening to us. When you forget about it, it is your firstborn who will be taken. We see that many firstborns have been taken in the wars in the Middle East and around the world, wars that our country is fighting. And many more first born will be taken in the future, unless people surrender to Allah and trust in Allah ﷻ. Although we may not see the blood on the door posts, it is on the hands of the oppressors and the fear-mongers and the disbelievers, despite their words of peace, justice, and freedom. Their intentions are clear from their actions.

But change doesn't come easily. We cannot expect people just to change overnight. Sometimes it happens. Sometimes an epiphany takes place, and someone wakes up. Then they have to have to courage to say they woke up. Just think about if the President of the United States, or the Prime Minister of England, or the president of

this or that country, woke up and realized what really is happening, who is really motivating what, and in whose interest this or that really is. They would have to take the next step and have the courage to stand up and say it. And then what would happen? Every time you get that wake up call, and you don't push the snooze button, you have big decisions you have to make. Sometimes it's step by step. So we have to help, step by step. I don't expect that I am going to wake up and have all that courage and power over myself. We need to help one another. This is the blessings of having our *shuyukh*, our *khanqah*, our *zaawiya*, our *tariqah*. And the later you wait, the harder it is.

The story of the Prophet Musa ﷺ is a vision of how one can meet the challenges of life (ordinary and extraordinary) and come to success, no matter what the odds are, no matter what it seems to be, especially at the times when you think your back is at the wall (or at the sea, as in his case) and you are trapped, defeat is imminent, and you have very little power against the armies that are assailing you.

وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمُ الْبَحْرَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ

WA'IDh FA-RAQ^aNĀ BIKUMU-L-BAHRA FA-
AÑJAYNĀKUM WA AGhRAQ^aNĀ ĀLA FIR^cAWNA
WA ANTUM TAÑDhURŪN

And [remember] when We split the sea and saved you,
and drowned the family of Pharaoh and you were
looking on? [2:50]

Remember, Qur'an tells us, to remember that the earth and the seas and the souls of every person in it belong to Allah. Anything is possible, by His will. One might ask if we are really on the side of Allah, why does victory not come easily? Some wonder why Allah doesn't just give the good people ease without struggle and without sacrifice. Everybody says, "It's hard. It's a struggle. I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I can face this." Allah says, and we should pay attention:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّا أَخَذْنَا أَهْلَهَا بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَاءِ
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَضَّرَّعُونَ

WA MĀ ARSALNĀ FĪ QARYATIM-MIN NABIYYIN
ILLĀ AKhADhNĀ AHLĀHĀ BI-L-BA'SĀA'I WA-D-
DARRĀA'I LA'ALLAHUM YADDARRA'ŪN

And We never sent a prophet in a town but We overtook
its people with distress and affliction, in order that they
might humble themselves. [7:94]

I told you there was a second thing: humility. Unless we reach a state of *tadarr*/humility, we cannot really understand what this path is about. It may have been over 3,000 years ago with Prophet Musa ﷺ and the Pharaoh, but it is also today in someone's life. All day today, while we have been together, many people's lives have had this confrontation. There is a purpose to hardship. It is to reach that state of humility before Allah. To understand the real concept of humility, imagine that you are in the center of a vast sea, and you are all alone on a boat. A huge storm is coming, and the waves become like mountain surrounding you. You turn to Allah and you ask Allah for His help. In that state of submission/*islam*, in that state of awe, or total dependency and total humility, that's *tadarr*. Your back is to the sea. Whatever is your hardship, that is the sea; and the armies of Pharaoh's are coming, and you are making the *hijrah* to freedom of the soul. Allah ﷻ creates hardship in order to grant us this gift of humility, but He also say says: "Fa inna ma'a-l-*usri yusra*. With hardship goes ease." We have to understand, then, that ease comes with humility.

Ease is not just making things easy. Ease is not necessarily the situation changing. Ease is to become humble before Allah, and to discover patience, and to discover perseverance, and to discover trust, and to discover your own fears. When you become humble before Allah, whatever the hardship, it loses its meaning, and it either goes away, or is solved, or is embraced as a blessing. Allah ﷻ creates those situations in order for us to understand our destiny, and for us

to reach a state of nearness to Allah, which otherwise we probably wouldn't even attempt to reach. That unique state of humility and nearness comes from total reliance on Allah ﷻ. If everything was easy, why would you make any effort for anything? Why would you want to know the person who made it easy, the personality, the mentality, the universality that made it easy? You wouldn't know it. How do we know we wouldn't know it? You wouldn't know the name of compassion and mercy, tolerance, justice, or peace. How do we know? Because the angels didn't know it. Everything was easy for them; no problems. That's the proof. Did the people and descendants of Musa's ﷺ community learn this lesson? Qur'an tells us in Surah al-A'raf that some did and others did not:

وَقَطَّعْنَاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُمَمًا مِنْهُمْ الصَّالِحُونَ وَمِنْهُمْ دُونَ ذَلِكَ
وَبَلَوْنَاهُمْ بِالْحَسَنَاتِ وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

WA QATTANAHUM FI-L-'ARDI UMAMAM-
MINHUMU-S-SALIHUNA WA MINHUM DUNA
DHALIKA WA BALAWNAHUM BI-L-HASANATI
WA-S-SAYYATI LA'ALLAHUM YARJI'UN

And We divided them throughout the earth into different groups. Of them, some of them were righteous, and some of them were otherwise. We tested them with good time and bad that perhaps they would return to obedience. [7:168]

When given a choice, most people opt for ease. Eventually, you realize you have to make a choice between the spiritual life and the worldly life. If you choose the worldly life, the spiritual life recedes totally or to form alone. You think you have a spiritual life. You might be praying five times a day, putting your head on the ground, opening the book, and reading it, studying the intricacies of *fiqh*—form, form, form. It doesn't always look like it's not spirituality, but the spiritual life disappears. Reliance on Allah leaves you. Want to be the Pharaoh who relies on the pyramid as the gateway to the spiritual life? If you choose the spiritual life, the worldly life doesn't

go away because you are living in this world, but your worldly life is balanced, fulfilled and meaningful. So don't worry. Living the spiritual life doesn't mean you leave the world; it means what's in the world becomes meaningful. Whatever comes to you is the means through which you slowly learn to trust in Allah. What is the means to trust in Allah? Ultimately, it is the Nuri Muhammad—*Allahumma salli 'alaa Sayyidinaa Muhammad, waseelatee 'alayka, wa aalibi wa sallam*—my means to Allah.

Through hardships, believers are purified, like gold that is heated to remove the dross. If you don't heat it, the gold will be full of impurities. Sort of like making ghee out of butter, the impurities are removed. There are two ways of making the ghee: you boil it and take it off the stove and skim it, repeatedly. Or, you put it on a low flame and let it boil and boil and boil. Those are the two ways of hardships: either Allah keeps boiling you for a long period of time, or He gives you some ease, and you skim it. This is what Allah ﷻ does with the believers. If you understand that, you will realize that the gold comes from inside of you, from the hardships and the difficulties, a gift and blessing from Allah ﷻ for those He loves. We don't have to want hardships and difficulties. Have any of you ever gone out looking for them? Is there anyone here who has never had a hardship or a difficulty, or worried about a hardship or difficulty? You don't go looking for it. It's not like we are fatalists trying to find something to be miserable about—quite the contrary. We are trying to find beauty in everything. And that's it. That's about a tenth of the story.

CLOSING DU'A

YĀ MAWJŪDAN ʿINDA-Sh-ShADĀĀ'IDI.
YĀ KHAFIYYA-L-LUTFI, YĀ LATĪFA-S-SUNʿI.
YĀ HALĪMAN, LĀ YA'JILUQDI HĀJATĪ
BI-RAHMATIKĀ, YĀ ARHAMA-R-RĀHIMĪN.
SUBHĀNAKA ʿALĀ HILMIKA BAʿDA ʿILMIK.
SUBHĀNAKA ʿALĀ ʿAFWIKA BAʿDA QUDRATIK.

O Existent One, O Thou Who are Present in all difficulties.
O Thou of Hidden Kindness, of Subtle Making.
O Gentle One, Who does not hasten, fulfill my need,
with Thy Mercy, O most Merciful of the merciful.
Glory be to Thee, on Thy Grace, after Thy Knowledge.
Glory be to Thee, on Thy forgiveness, after Thy Power.

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